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October 28, 1962

S/S - Carl Moore
Room 7241

TO: The Secretary
The Under Secretary
C - The Deputy Under Secretary

FROM: S/P - W. W. Rostow

SUBJECT: Forward Implications of the Cuban Crisis
for Planning Tasks re the Soviets.

I commend to you this thoughtful memorandum of
Mose Harvey's.

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October 28, 1962

TO: J. W. Rostow

FROM: Moss Harvey

SUBJECT: Forward Implications of the Cuban Crisis for Planning
Issues re the Soviets

1. The Armaments Problem. Assumption by the Soviets of the risks and costs of the Cuban venture must be read as strong evidence that (a) our intelligence estimates of Soviet inferiority in long range delivery capability have been correct, and (b) the Soviet leaders are anxious to offset this balance as quickly as possible. With regard to this offsetting problem, they may have been concerned to strengthen their hand for a Berlin ploy. It would be unwise, however, to assume this was their sole objective. It would seem probable they wanted cheaply and quickly to improve their over-all position. Cuba may have been simply a stop-gap pending Soviet catching up in ICBM's; it may have been a hoped-for permanent substitute for massive numbers of ICBM's (i.e., a means of insuring an all-round pay-off on the presumed earlier decision to place prime emphasis on ICBM and Kuch's); it may have been a holding operation to cover Soviet weakness while it continued to seek a means of leap-frogging the necessity of developing a massive ICBM capability.

It can hardly be assumed failure will result in the Soviet leaders becoming reconciled to their inferiority. I would think the reverse, that they will now be more anxious than ever to get themselves in a "position of strength".

We consequently have more urgent need than ever to stay on top of the weapons development problem. Any simple surmise that the Soviets will not bear great stresses and strains to get into a position of real equality, or superiority if at all possible, would be highly dangerous. The Cuban effort would seem a direct refutation of this. Moreover, to the other compulsions that were previously operating on them has now been added that of accepting a great and humiliating defeat. We must, therefore, take out all the insurance we can to be sure there is no leap-frog.

Conversely, we should not close our eyes to possibilities of progress in armaments control. Assuming we do whatever is necessary to

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leave the Soviets under no illusions about our own intention to cover all loopholes that might enable them to achieve a leap-frog — that is that we intend to do all that has to be done to keep ahead at whatever cost and for whatever time period required — they may be willing at least to agree to blunting the edges of the arms race, beginning with testing. (I hardly need point out the truly revolutionary break in their old positions the line of retreat they have taken constitutes.) We have need, therefore, to be imaginative in formulating safe but constructive proposals on disarmament, that is to survey the field and see which unnecessary impediments in our own approach can be thrown out.

2. Berlin. The unsuccessful test of our resolve in the Cuban crisis would make it seem unlikely that the Soviets will want to mount another crisis which would again put them in a position where it will have to accept war or back down. We would seem, therefore, to have good prospects of getting Berlin put on ice, and probably on conditions that would restore more normal conditions between east-Berlin and west-Berlin. We might even be able to get the wall down, or at least to get its rigidities relaxed. Perhaps we will have to do this under cover of a separate Soviet-East German peace treaty that would not affect any of our rights.

The planning problem on Berlin is, then, to work out a program of negotiations on Berlin that will insure our getting what we want, but will show movement on our part insofar as essentials are concerned.

3. Cuba. It may well be that Khrushchev's decision to abandon the bases in Cuba will end up being a decision to abandon Cuba. Initially, Moscow will probably seek to play the theme that it has insured the "independence of Cuba" which was its "only objective" all along. But Khrushchev can hardly see where any money is to be made in Cuba in the light of the firmness with which we dealt with the bases. Continued large-scale help may consequently be viewed as a profitless undertaking, from the standpoint of both Cuba and Latin America generally.

The planning task we face is to check out the above possibility and to work out a follow-up in Cuba that will maximize the prospect of getting rid of Castro once and for all. Our concentration should, of course, be on the Cuban people themselves. With the Soviet backdown, Castroism should increasingly be viewed as bankrupt, as offering nowhere to go but downward. Reestablishment of normal relations with the US and other American states will necessarily seem increasingly attractive.

4. Communist China. The Soviet backdown, as well as any improvements in atmospherics that may follow, will have a devastating impact on Sino-Soviet relations. This may not be apparent initially. It is conceivable, in fact, that initially the Soviet backdown will be excused by a faltering retreat, in the first instance in the conflict with India. But basically the Soviet performance should turn out something of a last straw to the Chinese. The repercussions should not stop with worsening relations between the two, but should generate added pressures for a change in basic orientation of the regime, (i.e., pressures to go down the Titoist track). There might first, of course, be a new try at bail-out through some irrational approach, but this would almost inevitably turn out counter-productive in the end, increasing rather than reducing the chances of an ultimate basic change.

Our planning need is, therefore, to get going with a refinement and modification of our China policy that will be designed to maximize the chances of getting the Chinese Communist problem better in hand.

5. General Reappraisal of Where the Soviets Stand. We have two broad possibilities of what the future may bring:

— The Khrushchev leadership may have resorted to the Cuban venture in the hope of quickly and cheaply recouping from the setback they have in fact suffered and as a means of putting themselves in a better position to push forward again. Cub may, in other words, have been a last ditch try to get enough out of their post-Sputnik offensive to keep the ball rolling or at least to keep it from slipping downhill. Cuba having failed, the leadership may now be prepared to modify substantially their intentions and expectations regarding the cold war. They may be prepared, in simplest terms, to have a go at genuine co-existence.

— The leadership may have thought Cuba would constitute a leap-frog. This not having happened, they may simply redouble their efforts to redress the power balance through more costly but surer efforts at home. They may thus seek a quieting of tensions pending the results of a further arms build-up.

In developing our policy, we should assume the first of these possibilities, but safeguard against the second.

To capitalize on a possible Soviet basic reappraisal of the merits of continuing at this stage active prosecution of the cold war, we need to drive for arrangements that will improve the free world position at the various crisis points noted above and in other ways, that is, to

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pull down and draw maximum benefit from the Soviet retreat. In order, however, to minimize the chances of the second possibility (a Soviet girding of loins), we need to take care to do whatever we can in the way of atmospherics. We obviously have no need to consider concessions that would cost us anything. But we should guard against at unnecessarily "rubbing their noses in it".

The basic problem lies in this: We can afford to operate on the basic assumption that the Soviet Union is a second class power, but we should recognize the great difficulty the Soviet leadership will have in accepting such a role in a fully undisguised form. Atmospherics, skill fully brought to bear, can in this circumstance be of decisive importance.

We should keep in mind the strong possibility that important elements in the Soviet leadership, perhaps including the military, are opposed to anything more than a passing "bowing to the wind". That the Cuban venture was undertaken at all adds weight to this possibility. Moreover, the strange performance re "the Khrushchev letters" suggest both differences and arguments within the leadership, and gives at least some reason to believe that a "hard" group may have at one point sold or forced a last go at prolonging risks to try to salvage something from the operation.

But in another way, the basic problem we now face is to attempt to capitalise on the turn of events (and here I have in mind not just the Cuban incident but the entire preceding trend of events) by going for a beginning of a liquidation of the cold war. For this we should exploit the victory we have gained not alone through seizing and nailing down redoubts from which we can better press the Soviets in the future, but also through making every effort to convince the Soviets of the intrinsic futility and unprofitability of the hostile course which they have pursued since the end of the war.

The planning challenge is that we devise policies that will maximize the chances of transforming a great particular victory into a historic turn in the whole course of post-war world relations.

6. All of the above involves, of course, planning tasks and efforts over a very long period. It is essential, however, that we keep in mind the problems posed from the very first. From this point on, any slight head in the tide can have great moment for the direction of future growth.

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